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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 005016

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: STRONG TURNOUT MARKS OPENING HOURS OF IRAQI ELECTIONS

REF: PHEE ELECTION TASKFORCE EMAILS

Classified By: Classified by Political Counselor Robert Ford for reason
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1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (SBU) The election for Iraq's new national assembly is progressing well with good turnout, along with technical problems in some locales. While strong voter participation was anticipated in the Shi'a-dominated south, our observers are reporting long lines and a festive atmosphere in the Sunni-dominated Anbar province. In some Sunni Arab areas we are getting reports from political party contacts of ballot shortages. Many provinces are finding voter registration lists incomplete; people are being turned away in some instances. Observer access to polling centers appears normal. There are pockets of violence in the country, but security does not seem to be impeding people from voting. There are reports about ballot manipulation, mainly in the Shia and Kurd-dominated areas. It is still too early to determine participation levels, but the flow is steady throughout Iraq. Local offices of IECE are actively trying to resolve technical issues as they arise. End Summary.

2. (SBU) There are encouraging signs that democracy has been embraced across Iraq. REO Basrah reports that women constitute a majority in many polling sites. In our visit to a West Baghdad polling station, the majority of voters also appeared to be women, many in western dress. In violence-plagued Fallujah, near the heart of the Sunni triangle, families are bringing their children to voting sites. In the Shi'a south, well organized transportation teams are bringing elderly voters in trucks to cast their first ballots for full-term representation. Although this is a partisan effort in support of the United Iraqi Coalition, the dominant Shi'a bloc, "get out the vote" campaigns demonstrate commitment and organization not often found in emerging democracies.

3. (C) Fraud, coercion and manipulation are also reported, principally in the south and in the Kurdish border cities of Kirkuk and Mosul. Registration problems in Kirkuk have left Kurds and others unable to vote because their names are not on the lists of registered voters. In Anbar province, there is one reported case of ballot box tampering by Shi'a employees of the electoral commission. There are reports of ballot shortages in Anbar, particularly in Fallujah. We have not confirmed the well-reported story of an intercepted truck filled with forged ballots from Iran. MNFI, however, doubts the veracity of the accusation. Turcoman sources have complained of Kurds being bussed into Kirkuk from surrounding provinces, although many of these may be voters who were moved out of Kirkuk during the regime of Saddam Hussein and explicitly permitted to register and vote there, even though their current residence is elsewhere.

4. (C) Pockets of violence have been reported in several provinces including Baghdad, but there is little evidence that they have suppressed participation. There have been explosions, rocket rounds and mortar attacks around Iraq today. (The Embassy compound received a direct hit at 0705 this morning, injuring three.) The Provincial Reconstruction Team's political officer in Mosul reported mortars and rounds in the early morning, but the attacks have since tailed off. Local press has reported that single suicide bomber (Egyptian) was arrested in Mosul before setting off the charge.

KHALILZAD